



If you had three wishes for legal services in this country, what would they be?

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I WISH LEGAL AID ADVOCATES could feel they do not have to apologize to anyone whenever they create some turmoil. That's what they sometimes have to do to make lasting improvement in the lives of poor people. And advocates need to know their funding sources support zealous advocacy on behalf of these people.

I'd wish for a huge loan forgiveness program to bring in the next generation of advocates.

And I wish people saw legal advocacy for the poor as a necessary activity in a society that believes accountability is important to maintaining democracy.

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FIRST, THAT EACH SEGMENT of our government that has some responsibility for the justice system steps up and meets it. There is need for a strong federal component, especially in states lacking other resources.

Next, I'd want us to create a system to give us a new generation of advocates for legal aid, and part of that is to address the student-debt problem that makes such a career difficult.

And I'd like a society not headed toward vilifying the poor, particularly immigrants—a shift in attitudes not just about civil justice but also rights and needs.



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There is still a great need for civil legal justice, really civil equal justice, but there is a perception that this issue has been solved. It hasn't. Especially here in the South, we are in a worse position now than when legal services programs became formalized.

There are so many kinds of legal needs that the Legal Services Corp. is no longer permitted to fund—immigration, class actions, welfare reform, predatory lending and others. Our bar groups and Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts programs are smaller and don't generate enough money to pick up much of that slack. More money for other things is available in states, like, say, New Jersey, which counts on legal services for less than a quarter of its funding.

But we get most of our funds from the Legal Services Corp. Some southern states, like Mississippi, lost population, so they're losing significant amounts of the federal LSC funding: \$1.5 million. We in the coastal states saw a gain in poverty, so, hooray, we win, I guess, and get a little more funding.

My three wishes: A bar that recognizes the need for a larger financial investment to extend legal services and equal justice to the community as a whole, so John Doe can get the same justice as John D. Rockefeller; more legal services providers in the South to do the things federally funded legal services can't; and more young attorneys who look to legal services as a career of choice. Loan forgiveness programs are coming state by state, but that's a snail's pace in the present economic climate. —INTERVIEWS BY TERRY CARTER

Do you have answers to the big questions? If you would like to participate in a future Big Q, please e-mail Terry Carter at terrypcarter@cox.net.